



THE EYE SHIELD

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MESSAGE FROM ME

Greetings, fellow Knightmare enthusiasts, and welcome to Issue 60 of The Eye Shield! Like so many of its recent predecessors, this issue is literally overflowing with Knightmare goodies for you to enjoy.

As well as my own humble efforts, Ross Thompson presents the sixth and final chapter of his *Adventure Time*, which brings this fourteen-year quest season to a close; Ricky Temple takes us back to Hubert Dracher's sham of an archery tournament - where the situation is about to get decidedly sticky for Rio Bolt - in the sixth chapter of *For Dungeon and Dungeon Master*; Martin "HStorm" Odoni gives us the lowdown on *Yes, Dungeon Master* in *The Audio Play's the Thing*; Drassil presents a hidden characters challenge in *A Knightmare Holiday*; Gehn "Lex" Luthor leads us on another enthralling stroll down Memory Lane as he examines a fresh batch of '80s pre-school TV shows in *When We Were Very Young*; there's a final bout of explanation and inspiration as we peruse Jon's notes on level three in *Scandinavian Knightmares*; and Ricky Temple is back with a new take on an old formula in *Kids' TV Shows I Didn't Grow Up With... But now enjoy!*

My sincere thanks go out as ever for all these fantastic contributions - they really do make The Eye Shield into the fanzine it was always supposed to be, which warms my otherwise bruised and battered heart no end! Remember, readers, if **you** have any contributions or comments for The Eye Shield, please don't hesitate to e-mail them to me (the ever grateful Jake Collins) at eyeshield2002@hotmail.com.

BREAKING NEWS: Audio commentaries for you to listen to and be enthralled by whilst watching episodes of Knightmare are now available to download at www.kmramdram.co.uk, featuring the melodious voices of Martin "HStorm" Odoni, Jake "Eyeshield" Collins and Rosey Collins.

MORE BREAKING NEWS: Coming very soon to www.kmramdram.co.uk, a new comedy sketch entitled *Sidriss the Confused and the Chamber of Secrets*, written by Jake Collins, featuring Jake Collins as Hordriss the Confuser and Rosey Collins as Sidriss the Confused.

Ricky Temple tells me about some of the inspiration behind his new *Kids' TV Shows* article.

I was inspired to write this article after you covered *The Mysterious Cities of Gold* in *Kids' TV Shows I Grew Up With* and I was influenced to go and buy the DVD to see what it was like – I thoroughly enjoyed it, in case you are wondering, so thanks for the recommendation!

I feel honoured to have made this small yet significant contribution to your life, Ricky!

Jim Waterman makes a convincing case for the uncredited voice of Mug the Gargoyle having been provided by Guy Standeven.

I'm about 99.9% convinced it's him. Watch the Mug sequences from series 1 and 2 and it'll become obvious that this is an undistorted version of Guy's Troll voice. He's trying to do something of an East End accent with the Troll as well, but the upper-middle-class vowels of Mug occasionally break through. Mug's voice is even more similar to Olgarth and Granitas - and I think it's more obvious with Olgarth's series 1 scenes, where he tended to speak much more slowly than Granitas.

Incidentally, I wonder what Guy Standeven is up to these days. Never mind that none of us knows what he looks like, given that he was hidden behind layers of Troll make-up...

This is interesting – having not listed any definite information about him for several years, the Internet Movie Database now reckons that Guy Standeven died in 1998, having been born in 1925. This means he would have been aged 73 at the time of his death, and 62/63 whilst appearing on Knightmare - but of course it's hard to make a judgment as to whether this is feasible, thanks to all that Troll make-up/wall monster mask.

Assuming that this information is correct, Guy Standeven went on after Knightmare to appear in Agatha Christie's Poirot, The Piglet Files and The Vampyr: A Soap Opera. But is this really the same actor? If so, John Woodnutt was actually the second Knightmare actor to pass away, and not the first as many of us thought! Answers on a postcard, please...

REMEMBER THIS?

Series 4. Level 2.

THE TOWER OF TIME

"The Tower of Time" is a term that can only be heard during the second episode of series 4, uttered once by Merlin and then a couple of times by dungeoneer Helen and her advisors. Merlin stated that it was the name of the castle in the middle of the Dunswater, which was expertly "played" by Leeds Castle in Kent. Certainly the castle and the huge natural moat strike an impressive pose, and I've always seen them as a fitting introduction to level three.

The only real challenge involved in crossing the Dunswater and reaching the Tower of Time was to have picked up all the precious metal on offer throughout level two. Of the four dungeoneers that made the crossing with the cowed ferryman, two paid with gold, one paid with silver, and one paid with silver and gold. Yes, the price was unusually high for Helen, and had been dropped by the time Alistair, Dickon and Giles made the crossing. Having said that, I have a theory that Nicky would also have been asked for silver and gold, had she made it past Ariadne, as she was already in possession of a bar of gold, and there appeared to be a bar of silver waiting for her in Ariadne's lair. Sadly, though, we'll never know for sure...

After being punted across the lake and entering Leeds Castle via the main visitors' entrance, dungeoneers would find themselves suddenly at the top of the main staircase of Castle Rising in Norfolk. From Kent to Norfolk in one step - that's quite a spacial shift! Yes, there was a lot of screen-time hogged by the eye shield before the dungeoneer actually reached level three, but I quite like the atmosphere generated by the sinister boat ride to the huge brooding castle, followed by the echoing footfalls on the stairs as level three draws ever nearer.

Whether or not you like the more epic feel that Knightmare adopted in series 4, there can be no denying that the Tower of Time did a lot to help create it. I like the Tower of Time, and I hope that you do too!

Difficulty: 2 All that was required was silver or gold, or silver and gold...

Killer Instinct: 0 If you got past Ariadne, you wouldn't die until level three.

Gore Factor: 4 It might have been fun to see a dungeoneer drown!

Fairness: 10 A very nice prelude to the third level, I've always thought.

ADVENTURE TIME

The Time of Reckoning

By Ross Thompson

Danny steps forward as Motley laughs at the creature walking towards them.

"No problem," Motley laughs. "Hello, little eight-legs, coming to kill, are we? I must say, that hairy face is enough to kill anyone. You're so hairy, you can't kill anyone, just tickle them!"

Ariadne stalks off angrily out of the lair.

"Thank you," Danny says to Motley.

"That's okay," replies Motley, "gotta have my bit of fun, haven't I?"

The team direct Danny out of the lair as quickly as they can.

Danny steps into a blue-bricked room - the Block and Tackle.

"Spiders I can deal with - but great huge pits are really not my thing. I'm off!" exclaims Motley, and in a dash he disappears.

The team are left on their own to tackle the challenge. Danny runs forward just as a block flies past behind him, and then a pit appears to his left. Amanda tells him to side-step right and run forwards again. Blocks are flying everywhere and the team have a few close calls, but just make it out of the door in time.

"A close call at the Block and Tackle has reduced your energy, Danny," warns Treguard.

There is some bread at Danny's feet, which he picks up eagerly.

Danny finds himself in a dimly lit cave, with two cracks in the walls making doors with paths adjoining them. But these paths are only connected by the long nose of a dragon, who is fast asleep.

"Tiptoe forwards, slowly," warns Yartej, remembering the words of the Oracle of Confusion. Danny steps forward on his toes, keeping as quiet as he can. He leaves the end of the nose, and steps boldly through the next door.

Danny walks into a small room with just one door opposite him. Standing just in front of the door is a guard in shining armour, waving a club menacingly at Danny.

"Password - or you perish!" the guard says threateningly.

Julie begins to speak, but Danny takes things into his own hands.

"Forgive me, sir, but I do not have the password with me today..." (the guard steps forward eagerly) "...but I do have a present worthy of your

nobility. I bring with me a bar of gold, specially for you."

The guard steps forward greedily, and snatches the gold from Danny's hand.

"I must say, this is very nice gold. I might as well give you a spell that's been hanging round here for years now - and I don't know how to deal with magic. It's called HAMMER. Now go - before I change my mind."

Danny thanks the guard and runs out of the room quickly.

He finds himself in a small cave, with a wellway at one end... but sitting on the well is none other than Morghanna!

"You have insulted me by remaining alive this long - prepare to meet your end!"

Morghanna raises her arms and a flashing magical sword flies towards Danny. They have little time - but the team is quick and casts the HAMMER spell. Suddenly, a hammer falls from the sky and lands on Morghanna's head. She screams as in a flash of light, Mogdred appears in the room.

"Morghanna - can you not even get rid of a puny dungeoneer?"

"If you're so clever, you do it! We're working together, aren't we?"

"I have no time for people so weak!"

Morghanna and Mogdred conjure swords and begin fighting each other. Danny uses the opportunity to sneak round them and enter the well quickly. He falls down it.

Danny lands in a small cave, full of bones scattered on the floor.

"Team, this is level three," warns Treguard, "a dangerous and deadly place, made even more threatening as Lord Fear rules over it and watches your every move. We did not manage to conquer Mogdred's forces, but there is a way of destroying Lord Fear's army, weakening him considerably. His cavernwights, scorpions and skeletrons all operate by magic - magic emitted by an orb hidden deep in this level. If you were to destroy this orb by the time this phase of the quest ends, then he will be an easier target for the next year of questing. But hurry - the phase will end soon!"

Danny is guided quickly through the cave to the exit on the left. The skeleton bones suddenly jump up and form skeletrons, and so Amanda quickly leads Danny out of the cave.

The team emerge into a small clue room with a table in the middle, with two exits. Danny walks up to the table. There is the reach wand, a dagger and a bar of soap.

"The reach wand!" exclaims Danny, and he picks it up.

"If you are to use the reach wand, it counts as one of your two items, team," Treguard warns them.

"Well, I don't see the use of soap, but we're not meant to pick up weapons," Julie says, so the team decide to take the soap and the reach wand.

"Call Hordriss," says Amanda. "Say Malefact three times."

Danny does so, and Hordriss appears. He thanks them for the wand, and the team tell him about the orb.

"Aye, and Queen Kalina is the only one that knows where it is hidden, but as you know she is trapped by Lord Fear," says Hordriss. "I will give you some magic that will free her. Upon finding her, you must release her with the spell LOOSE and she will tell you where the orb is. You must then destroy this with the spell DESTRICT. Good luck on your mission. I must go."

There are two exits from the room. Julie decides they should take the left door. Danny steps through it.

He emerges into a red room with veins all over the walls.

"Oh dear, team - it appears you have landed yourself in the stomach of a monster."

Yartej tells Danny to use the soap. He rubs it all over the floor, and then suddenly a big gurgle is heard and Danny is flown out of the stomach. He lands in a small room with Queen Kalina in a cage made of skeletron bones.

"Help me! Lord Fear has gone, so this is our only chance!"

The team cast the spell LOOSE, and the bones loosen and fall to the floor. Queen Kalina steps out quickly, thanking Danny.

"This is not a place to linger. Follow me and we will talk!"

At the other side of the room, Sylvester Hands appears. Queen Kalina screams and runs with Danny out of the room.

They emerge into a labyrinth of caves, but Queen Kalina and Danny run flat out, trying to avoid Sylvester Hands. They finally find themselves in the Sewers of Goth, and jump into the boat as quickly as they can. They begin rowing, as Sylvester runs into the sewers, cursing.

"I may not have caught you this time, but now I'm calling my master!"

He runs off as Queen Kalina talks to Danny.

"I must thank you so much for rescuing me."

"No problem," replies Danny. "Do you know where the orb is?"

"I do! When you get into the next chamber, take the right-hand door. Use the password *Hair* to pass the blocker, and walk along the

narrow beam. The orb is at the end. I must leave you now - but good luck!"

Danny finds himself in a small chamber. As instructed, he steps through the right-hand door. He finds himself in a small cave once more, but a stony face blocks his path.

"Password!"

"Hair."

The blocker moves and Danny walks past it and through the door.

Danny reaches the final obstacle before the orb - the long and narrow beam.

"Hurry, team - you are almost at the orb, but this phase of questing is almost at an end!" Treguard urges.

Julie starts to guide Danny and he steps along the beam, but Lord Fear's face appears.

"You think you can thwart me? Well, think again! You've had fun in my little games so far, but fun must always come to an end. Spellcasting: S-W-O-R-D."

A sword chases Danny down the path as Julie desperately guides him across it. He has to turn round sharply; he turns successfully and Julie tells him to step forward, but he takes a very big step. The team all shout, but it is too late as Danny plunges into the abyss.

"Ooh, nasty!" Treguard chuckles. "Your dungeoneer fell at the final hurdle, team, and Lord Fear will now be just as strong in the next phase. You must now go and meet Danny outside the Dungeon walls. Spellcasting: D-I-S-M-I-S-S."

The team are reunited on the path and walk homeward, disappointed.

"I thought we had it then, but Lord Fear's forces are still as strong as ever," Treguard muses. "Morghanna and Mogdred live too, and so next phase their forces will be relentless. But will you let them win once more? Of course not, so if you are willing to pick up the gauntlet, then answer the call. I'll be waiting for you."

PUZZLE PAGE ONE

Going For Nightmare II

In the style of former BBC One and current Channel Five gameshow Going For Gold, the following descriptions are all worth a maximum of four points. Ask former ITN newsreader John Suchet (or, if you can't find him, ask someone else) to read each question to you and try to shout out the correct answer as soon as possible. If you answer correctly whilst your questioner is reading out the pink section, you get four points. If you answer correctly whilst your questioner is reading out the green section, you get three points. If you answer correctly whilst your questioner is reading out the blue section, you get two points. If you answer correctly whilst your questioner is reading out the red section, you get one point. Tot up your score out of forty at the end and see how well you did!

- 1) I am a Nightmare character from series 6. I also appeared in series 7. I made my final appearances in series 8. Beginning with S, I am... who?
- 2) I am a Nightmare creature that first appeared in series 3. I was frequently used to hurry dungeoneers out of rooms. I was a life force threat. Beginning with G, I am a Skull... what?
- 3) I am a dungeoneer from series 3. I made it to level three. I reached the Stained Glass Window. Beginning with L, I am... who?
- 4) I am a Nightmare puzzle from series 4. I could be found on level two or three. I killed exactly half the dungeoneers that attempted me. Beginning with T, I am the Block and... what?
- 5) I am a clue object that first appeared in series 1. My final appearance was in series 8. I was used at least once in series 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 as well. Beginning with G, I am what precious metal?
- 6) I am a Nightmare character who first appeared in series 5. I also appeared in series 6, 7 and 8. I did not wear the same costume for my entire tenure. Beginning with F, I am Lord... who?
- 7) I am a Nightmare creature from series 8. I usually travelled in pairs. I was armed with a trident. Beginning with M, I am a... what?

- 8) I am a dungeoneer from series 4. I did not make it to level three. I did not die at the Block and Tackle. Beginning with N, I am... who?
- 9) I am a Nightmare puzzle from series 5. I also appeared in series 6. I had many different combinations. Beginning with C, I am a... what?
- 10) I am a clue object that first appeared in series 3. I also appeared in series 5 and 8, but unlike in series 3, I was not picked up. I belonged to a character. Beginning with B, I am Motley's... what?

CLASSIC QUEST

Series 4

Quest: The Crown.

Dungeoneer: Nicky Cook.

Advisors: Carina, Emma and Catherine.

Home town: St Albans, Hertfordshire.

Team score: 5 out of 10.

This was the first of three teams to hail from St Albans, which is just down the road from me. I used to have a cutting from the local paper of the girls with Treguard and Pickle, but I haven't seen it for more than fifteen years. Anyway, although they were local lasses, I could never be very impressed with this distinctly shaky effort.

Level One: After a wobbly start at the Place of Choice and a score of two with Dooris, Nicky is presented (not exactly uniquely in this series) with the opportunity to make a pact with Hordriss the Confuser, who certainly lives up to his name as he confuses the team inordinately by assuming that Nicky has arrived for a job interview: *"And what makes you think that you possess the qualifications for this post?"* - *Hordriss*. When the situation has been clarified, the team agrees to collect a dagger of darkness for Hordriss in return for magical aid. As usual, the pact is sealed with the procurement of the eye shield.

Nicky progresses through the Forest of Dunn, where she meets Brother Mace and an assassin, who are about to sit down to lunch together. A very funny scene ensues, which is actually completely pointless in the context of the quest itself, resulting in Brother Mace knocking out the mute assassin (to whom the tavern monk has given the moniker *Brother Silence*) by whacking him over the head with a joint of meat. Mace then leads Nicky into Oakley's glade, before wandering back off into the forest. Oakley soon appears and poses the customary three questions, although unlike all the tree troll's other questions, these are not nature-based, and would have done just as well for a wall monster. They manage to score a creditable two, so Oakley passes on sufficient information for Nicky to pick up a bar of gold and a jar labelled SMALL, leaving behind a talisman.

Nicky progresses to the ruins of Dungarth, where Fatilla is on guard. After deciding that the SMALL potion would be of no use to him, Fatilla

contents himself to accept the bar of gold and let Nicky through. Inside the ruins, Nicky encounters a very small door. By uncorking the bottle, Nicky shrinks to a fraction of her former size and is able to leave the room. Fortunately, Motley is waiting for her in the next room, and even more fortunately, he has filched some Grow-Me-Quick powder from Merlin's study, which he uses to change Nicky back to her normal size. The wellway room follows, where a skull ghost is on guard. The advisors begin to panic slightly, but they manage to direct Nicky into the well.

Level Two: Nicky's first task is to free Mellisandre from the stocks, which she does without too much dithering. Mellie leads Nicky to a clue room, where she picks up a rope and a bar of gold. Two goblins run into the room and start menacing the two young maidens, but Gundrada turns up and drives the creatures away with ease. After exchanging a few pleasantries with the Sword Mistress, Mellie and Nicky progress to the next chamber. It is only then that Mellie thinks to mention that she really needs the rope in order to climb back up to level one. Although she has nothing to exchange, Nicky lets her have the rope, and Mellie's somewhat pointless appearance in the quest ends there.

Merlin's room follows. Predictably, the wizard is in disguise (that is, he's wearing that brown sackcloth robe he's so fond of in this series) and pleads with Nicky to release him from the stocks, which she does without too much preamble. Merlin then poses the team a riddle: *"Cold as death and slow heartbeat, hunger dies in winter's sleep."* - **Merlin**. Very quickly, Carina hits on the answer ("hibernation") without even realising it - "something that hibernates" is her suggestion. Unfortunately, the advisors then dither over other possibilities before coming up with "water" as their final answer. Consequently, Merlin does not award them any magic, and by now we all know what that means!

Nicky encounters Doorkis in the next chamber, and the team only just manages to come up with two correct answers. They press on once more, but they are only delaying the inevitable, of course, as Nicky progresses into Dunkley Wood, where Ariadne is waiting for her. Nicky is soon devoured by the giant spider, to the accompaniment of a nice crunching sound effect: *"If only you'd earned some of Merlin's magic, then you could have made the spider hibernate."* - **Treguard**.

Summary: A level two performance sure enough, but as Pickle observed, this really was a case of *more luck than judgment*, and because their

judgment was too poor to realise that Carina had actually solved Merlin's riddle, they paid the price.

FOR DUNGEON AND DUNGEON MASTER

By Ricky Temple

As Hubert Dracher was making his way over to the spectators' gallery to take his seat, the Crown Princess Deanery's Shar had already taken hers. She had chosen one which gave her a good view of the spot in which her "champion" would defend the honour of both Winteria and the House of Shar.

As she was surveying the tournament area, she became aware of someone approaching on her left. She paid the person no heed as they sat down beside her. She knew it was a female - she could smell perfume and also, out of the corner of her eye, she could see long, flowing blond hair.

Just then the female spoke to her. "Good day to you, Your Highness. It is a pleasure to meet you."

Deanery's turned and looked at her, and was immediately wrong-footed. She had never met this woman before, of that she was positive, and yet there was something oddly familiar about her. Deanery's nodded her head in polite greeting. "Good day to you, Miss."

She looked this female up and down. She was certain they had never met, and yet she could not shake the feeling that they had.

"Forgive my forwardness, Your Majesty, but I was so anxious to meet you. What do you think to the tournament? I'm sorry you won't be able to take part," the female continued.

"Yes, but what will be will be," Deanery's responded. "As to the tournament, it would seem Mr Dracher has assembled quite the collection of talented archers."

"Indeed. He has invited only the finest from all over the realm."

Deanery's could no longer stand the strange sense of familiarity about this apparent stranger. "Excuse me, but you do seem to have me at a disadvantage, Miss. You know my name but I do not know yours."

The blond female looked right at her and smiled. "Oh, do forgive me. My name is Countess Jane Mercurio."

Just then another person joined them. It was Countess Mercurio's bodyguard; he did not sit down, but stood beside and slightly in front of the Countess, his arms folded across his chest.

"And this is my bodyguard," the Countess continued, gesturing to the new arrival.

Deanery's regarded the new arrival and smiled - now she knew for definite who this was. The "surname" had given it away and the "bodyguard" confirmed it. The bodyguard was undoubtedly one of her brother's fellow mercenaries, a mute acrobatic burglar - the scar across his throat was unmistakable. And the "Countess"...

"Delighted to meet you, Countess Mercurio," Deanery's said, holding her hand out for Mercurio to kiss.

Countess Jane Mercurio (a.k.a. Lady Mercury) looked up at Deanery's and smiled. "A pleasure for me also, Your Highness. I do hope you enjoy the tournament."

Lady Mercury then returned her gaze to the tournament field. Deanery's could tell that she was slightly nervous.

Meanwhile, Rio and Zyssa were making their way over to their allotted space.

"Space Eighteen, the steward said," Zyssa said, looking at the parchment she held in her hand. "There it is, over there!"

Rio looked and sighed. "Right between the Winterian and Great Mire representatives, the two most Opposition aligned kingdoms in the whole realm!"

Zyssa bit her bottom lip nervously. "The Great Mire representative may not be Opposition aligned," she said, trying to be optimistic.

"No," Rio agreed, "we could get lucky and have him only be an acolyte of 'Queen' Maldame... at least that would be the lesser of two evils."

Zyssa gulped slightly. Rio, seeing this, took her hand and squeezed it

gently. "It'll be all right, Zyssa," he said quietly.

She looked at him and he winked at her. Zyssa smiled back. Rio looked back once more towards his position; the two other archers either side of him had already arrived. He hadn't told Zyssa and his body language didn't betray how nervous being stuck between two possible Opposition aligned archers made him, and that mysterious coach driver was still plaguing his thoughts... just where had he disappeared to?

"Greetings, Archer. Greetings, my Lady." The voice of the Winterian representative broke through Rio's chain of worrying thoughts.

"Greetings to you also, fellow Archer. I am Kal of Greenshades and this is my second, my fiancée Miss Elizabeth Fern."

"I am called Jonathan DeCobray, and my second is known as Weston."

The blind Weston bowed his head in the general direction of Rio and Zyssa. "Greetings," he intoned.

Rio nodded his head, while Zyssa curtsied to both men. She noticed briefly that DeCobray was giving her a strange look, but he quickly turned his attention back to Rio.

"Well, at least you're more social than our other friend over there," he said, indicating the Great Mire representative. "All he's said so far is that he's called Vizar Galgen and he's from the Great Mire, but other than that nothing but stone silence. And his second hasn't even said that much."

DeCobray gestured to a figure standing behind Galgen, who was dressed in long black robes and was wearing a helmet with the visor pulled down, totally obscuring his face.

Rio looked over at Vizar Galgen and his second, then he shrugged. "Maybe they're more focused on winning than making niceties."

"Or they just have extremely bad manners," Weston countered, at which DeCobray chuckled. Rio was about to say something when a trumpet sounded and a hush fell over the crowd. All the archers, seconds and spectators turned to the VIP box - Hubert Dracher was about to address

the crowd and officially start the tournament.

"Lord, Ladies and Gentlemen and esteemed guests, let me first take this opportunity to welcome you all to my estate and to express my thanks to those archers who accepted my invitation to participate in this humble tournament," said Dracher. "The rules of the tournament are as follows: You have all been split into groups of six, with a judge for each group. Each archer has three shots for each round. There are two rounds, so there will be six arrows each. At the end of both rounds the archer with the lowest score will be eliminated, and so it will go on until three members of each group have been eliminated. The remaining three archers will then be joined by three archers from another group and the process will start again, until we are down to just three archers. We will then have a final shootout - the highest scorer will be declared the winner, and the recipient of the grand prize of nine thousand gold pieces!"

The crowd all cheered and applauded.

"Let the tournament... begin!" Dracher declared.

For the next two to three hours, all that could be heard was the sound of bow and crossbow strings being drawn, the twangs and clicks as they were released, the whistle of arrows flying through the air, and the dull thud as they impacted into the targets, or the groan of the crowd as they fell short or went too wide and embedded themselves into the ground. Every so often an archer would be eliminated and he or she would walk off the field. Most left with quiet dignity but the odd one did make a scene.

Most of the complaints stemmed from the archers who were eliminated from the group containing Kal of Greenshades (a.k.a. Rio Bolt), Commander Jonathan DeCobray and Vizar Galgen. Fixed, professionals and illegal techniques were some of the muttered accusations against the three, who were consistently in the top five scorers of the whole tournament.

"Nice shot," DeCobray complimented Rio, as his arrow struck the centre of the bull's eye.

"You're not too shabby yourself, Commander," Rio replied, as DeCobray's crossbow bolt struck just off centre.

"Hmm, I'm still not used to this type of crossbow. Rather have my repeater," DeCobray muttered, causing Weston to jerk his head up slightly and silently utter a curse.

"Oh, you normally use a repeater crossbow?" Rio asked, a hint of suspicion in his voice. "I thought they were only used by Assassin Guild archers."

"We also use them in the ranks of the Royal Huntsmen," DeCobray quickly explained. "You've more chance of a second shot with them should you miss your first shot, and also it means you can put a wounded animal out of its misery quicker if you don't have to take the time to reload."

Rio nodded in agreement, although he didn't actually believe this story.

"If you two don't mind, this is an archery tournament, not a sewing circle!" Vizar Galgen said sourly.

"Oh, the silent one speaks, does he?" DeCobray said sarcastically. "I was beginning to think you were only able to say your name and where you came from."

Vizar Galgen looked hard at DeCobray. "I prefer to let my archery skills do the talking, and I don't need to rely on a mechanical contraption to aid them," he said dismissively to DeCobray, who now regarded Vizar with a deadly stare.

"There's an old saying, my dear Vizar Galgen. When a man with a longbow meets a man with a crossbow, the man with the bow is dead before he's even had time to draw his bow."

Just then the trumpet sounded again, signalling a break for the remaining archers.

"Ah, refreshments. Come along, Elizabeth my love," Rio said, taking Zyssa by the arm and walking towards where the refreshments were being served.

Vizar Galgen and his strangely silent second also departed. DeCobray hung around for a few moments, ostensibly to adjust the sight on his crossbow. Weston came over to him.

"Well, what do you think?" DeCobray asked Weston, when everyone else was out of earshot.

"That Kal is definitely either a Green Warden or a Ranger, Chief," Weston replied. "There's no way he's militia - his skill and accuracy are far too great for that."

"Hmm," DeCobray nodded. "And did you see who his second was? That former Green Warden and serving wench from the Crazy Heifer, Zyssa Silverdale!"

"I just hope she didn't make us," Weston said.

"So the Powers That Be have sent a representative, and as for that other one..." DeCobray said, indicating the point where Vizar Galgen had stood.

Weston nodded and said, "A Black Grenadier if ever I saw one."

DeCobray sighed. "Trust his Lordship to send one of his elite troops to protect his investment."

"What do we do about these unexpected inconveniences, Squire?" Weston asked.

"Unexpected maybe, but inconveniences at most. We can deal with the Black Grenadier and his companion ourselves when the time is right. But in regards to the two Powers That Be agents... well, we've no orders to kill them. Besides, the prospect of opening hostilities with the Powers That Be is out of the question," DeCobray reasoned. "Not to mention bad for prospective business," he added as an afterthought.

"Naturally. So it seems we've no choice but to put up with them, then..."

"Not necessarily. We may be able to eliminate our fine archer from the equation in a non fatal way. Come on, let's find Keno and her Ladyship - I have an idea!"

"Why is it that I feel an impending sense of dread every time you utter those words, Squire?"

"A little faith would not go amiss, Weston. Have I ever steered you wrong?"

"Numerously, and often twice on the same day."

"Well, they do say there's a first time for everything," DeCobray chuckled. "Now then, quick sharp, my dear 'second', before I'm forced to pull rank on you," he added with an undisguised smirk.

The two hurried off towards the refreshment tent, with Weston muttering something under his breath about 'class injustice'. Inside, Rio and Zyssa were mingling with the remaining archers and spectators. They didn't notice DeCobray and Weston slipping in through the tent flaps, nor did they see the Countess Jane Mercurio detach herself from Hubert Dracher's entourage and go over to converse with them.

"Think you can do it, Isabel?" DeCobray asked the disguised Lady Mercury, who merely smiled.

"Need you ask, my love?" she replied, before turning and heading back to Dracher's entourage. She quickly whispered something to her bodyguard, who nodded and left the tent. Jane Mercurio then made her way over to Rio and Zyssa.

"Are you the archer from Greenshades?" she asked in a silky voice.

"Yes, my Lady, I am Kal of Greenshades and this is my second..."

"I am Countess Jane Mercurio, and I must say, my dear Kal," the Countess continued, cutting him off, "that you are by far the most highly skilled archer in the tournament so far." She then offered him her hand to kiss.

"Well, thank you for your kind words, Countess," Rio said, bowing and then kissing her hand. "I spent much of my youth practising."

"Ah, I too spent many a day practising the noble art of archery, but sadly as a young maid I never had the patience for it," Countess Mercurio said sadly, before adding in a more seductive tone, "perhaps you could give me a few pointers now?" She batted her eyelids at Rio. "There is still

an hour before the tournament resumes, and I have my own bow and arrow in my room."

"I'm flattered, Countess, but..."

"Oh, don't worry - Hubert will never find out. I'll be in my room, waiting for you - it's the third door on the right once you've gone up the main staircase."

She then kissed Rio on the left cheek and walked out of the tent. A stunned Rio watched her go, then he turned to Zyssa, who was also watching the departing Countess, but with a much harder look.

"High class hussy!" she said.

"Maybe... but then again, she might be able to tell us something," Rio said thoughtfully.

"I bet she could do more than *te//*you," Zyssa said.

"Is someone jealous?" Rio teased.

"No!" Zyssa responded, though she turned a deep shade of red.

"Don't worry, Zyssa. Women like that don't turn my head, but she may just be able to answer a few questions I have nagging in my mind."

"What questions?" Zyssa asked.

"She was sitting next to the Crown Princess in the spectators' box, right?" Rio asked, and Zyssa nodded. "Well, then she just might be able to tell us who the princess's driver was."

"I knew you weren't telling me everything about that coach incident, Rio!" Zyssa snapped at her partner.

Rio smiled. "That's because until I get some answers to these niggling questions, there's nothing worth telling," he responded. "Now be a good girl and wait here for me. I'll be back before you know it, and if there's anything to tell I promise I'll fill you in straightaway, okay?"

"Okay, Rio... just be careful, it could be a trap!" Zyssa said.

Rio stroked her on the cheek and then left. He made his way into Dracher's home without the guards seeing him and ascended the staircase. He quietly made his way to the third room along. The door was ajar.

Pushing the door open cautiously, being wary of the aging hinges, he crept into the room. Soft furnishings decorated the floor and walls, with obviously valuable vases and ornaments of all descriptions dotted around atop assorted plinths and tables. He noted a bottle of wine that had been opened and left to air on the table beside the room's largest presence, an impressive four-poster bed with velvet drapes and soft violet pillows.

There was nothing about the room's décor that instantly put the Ranger on guard. And yet, there was still something that unsettled him.

He was aware of a presence behind him. "Ah, Countess. I trust I'm not..."

The next thing he knew, Rio found himself crashing to the floor thanks to a powerful blow from behind. Struggling to regain his senses, he attempted to push himself up again, but he was instantly hauled to his feet by his assailant and smashed against the wall, where he fell into a crumpled heap.

He pulled himself up. Even though his vision was blurry from both blows, he managed to make out the two figures closing in on him - one bulky, the other thinner. Thinking quickly, he lashed out with his foot and caught the thin one off guard. As he staggered, Rio seized his brief window of opportunity and struck him firmly in the ribcage, sending him sprawling backwards and cracking his head on the writing table behind him. He slumped to the floor, unconscious.

This momentary break allowed Rio to gather his wits and clear his vision. He just managed to dodge out of the way of the incoming fist of the Countess's bodyguard, which instead connected with the solid stone wall. The bodyguard made a grunting noise, barely registering the impact, and turned to face Rio again.

That should have been enough to break every bone in his fist! thought Rio. What manner of demon is this giant?

Sensing his moment, the Ranger met him with a hard right to the jaw. Again the bodyguard merely grunted, shrugging off the blow as if it were no more of an annoyance than a mosquito bite. Rio struck him again and was greeted with the same response, only this time accompanied by a toothy grin from the giant.

Before Rio could strike a third blow, the bodyguard lashed out with one of his own and knocked Rio backwards onto the velvet couch. He moved towards him, crouched down and with both hands outstretched, obviously intending to strangle the stunned Ranger. Thinking swiftly, Rio felt his fingers curl around the handle of the porcelain vase on the pedestal nearby, which he brought down with all his strength onto his attacker's head.

The vase exploded into dozens of pieces, succeeding in stunning the hulking bodyguard, who staggered backwards, clearly dazed. Seeing his opening, Rio charged him headfirst and rammed his shoulder into the bodyguard, knocking him backwards. There was the sound of wood splintering as he crashed through the oaken doors of a hand carved wardrobe. Rio watched as he made one final attempt to get up before his eyes rolled upwards and he slumped backwards, out cold.

Rio dusted himself off and took a few moments to compose himself, taking the opportunity to pour himself a drink from the open bottle of wine. The sweet taste of the beverage calmed his nerves and succeeded in lowering the spasms of pain in his head to a dull throb - still painful, but now somewhat tolerable.

He then went over to each of his would-be assailants and took a good look at them. He rolled the thin one onto his back, and moved the broken wood and ruined dresses from his larger companion. He did not need to examine them for long - even a cursory glance confirmed all that he had suspected thus far.

"I'll leave you two to tidy up," he said as he walked across the room to where he had entered, sighing and shaking his head as he closed the door behind him.

Idly brushing traces of porcelain from his cloak as he descended the stairs, his mind buzzed over the ramifications of this considerably painful

encounter.

He had been right - it HAD been Drago Lestrade driving that coach! He knew that now because it was Drago Lestrade who was now lying sprawled out in the Countess Mercurio's room, and his companion who was slumped in her wardrobe was a man called Keno, known in certain circles as the Alley Cat - an acrobat and burglar who was the brute strength of that particular group.

Damn it, that's all we needed! The presence of the Opposition is bad enough, but having to contend with THAT lot as well... this mission just got a great deal more complicated!

For now there was no doubt in Rio's mind - the Fire & Ice mercenary gang were somewhere on the estate.

THE AUDIO PLAY'S THE THING

So, have you toddled over to www.kmramdram.co.uk and listened to the latest audio play - *Yes, Dungeon Master* - yet? If not, I strongly recommend that you do so in the very near future. *YDM* is another comedy play, with a fully satisfying runtime of just over fifty minutes. There's Nightmare-related fun and laughter galore, so make sure you give it a listen!

YES, DUNGEON MASTER (Released September 2009):

Written by **Martin Odoni**.

Featuring **Russell Odoni** as Treguard Myatt, **Jake Collins** as Sir Hordriss T Appleby and First Supporter, **Andy Marshall** as Bernard Folly, **Matt Richings** as Merlin, **Rosey Collins** as the Descender, **Helen Becconsall** as Majida, the Commentator and Second Supporter, and **Martin Odoni** as the Returning Officer and the Throne.

Knightmare Castle has just taken delivery of a brand new Dungeon Master - Treguard Myatt of Dunshelm. Treguard is determined to stamp his authority on the Dungeon and make sure that it's run according to his rules, but Sir Hordriss T Appleby - a cunning old stick-in-the-mud - has more than a few objections to Treguard's plans.

As you may have already worked out (from the title, if nothing else) this play draws a lot of inspiration from the BBC sitcom *Yes, Minister*. However, you shouldn't for one moment think that this renders the jokes inaccessible to those who haven't seen this particular programme - it doesn't! The humour is very much grounded in Nightmare, and while fans of *Yes, Minister* will doubtless appreciate the specific characters and situations that are based on said programme a good deal more than the more uninitiated among us, this should in no way spoil the enjoyment for anyone who hasn't seen *Yes, Minister*. Indeed, I myself have only a passing familiarity with the programme, but I still got all the jokes in *YDM*!

Now, let's turn to Martin "HStorm" Odoni - the head honcho over at Audio Play Central - for all the insider info on *YDM*!

THE EYE SHIELD: Tell us about the various sources of inspiration behind *YDM*.

MARTIN ODONI: Outside of *Knightmare* itself, the chief inspiration for

Yes, Dungeon Master is *Yes, Minister*, and its sequel, *Yes, Prime Minister*. But there were also ideas that were taken from *Red Dwarf* and *The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I won't bother listing them, as I'm sure most listeners will have recognised them. (And even if they haven't, it'll be more fun for them to try and spot them for themselves.) There was also a nice opportunity for me to sneak a couple of *Knightmare* in-jokes into the proceedings. Again, I'll leave it to listeners to find them for themselves.

I shan't make pretentious noises about *YDM's* origins, or try to credit it with being part of some kind of grand literary plan (I mean, it's not like I'd be fooling anyone); my reasons for writing it were chiefly self-indulgence. I'd obtained all the DVDs of *Yes, Minister* early in 2006 - I'd often have them playing in the background while I was busy mixing *Famous For Retreating* - and I noticed that there were similarities between three of the prominent cast members of *Knightmare* and the three central characters of *Yes, Minister*. Treguard in his quarrels with Majida would often take on the same hapless, exasperated quality that Jim Hacker could never escape from, Hordriss had a pompous, verbose superiority complex that reminded me of Sir Humphrey Appleby, while Pickle seemed almost indistinguishable from Bernard Woolley. (Because of early casting problems, I swapped Pickle with Folly in the second draft of *YDM*. I probably should have changed them back later when the cast continued to change, but I decided not to because "Folly" sounds more like "Woolley" anyway.)

All of that led me to start wondering what it must be like for Treguard to try and run the castle between seasons. *What*, I began speculating, *if the staff of a medieval castle genuinely did behave like a Twentieth Century, elephantine bureaucratic machine?* I bounced the idea off my dear brother, Ruzl, and later off Andrew Kenny, and they both gave me looks that said, "The whole concept sounds so stupid, it's bound to work!" And the idea sort of snowballed from there.

In short, I decided to write the script mainly to satisfy my own curiosity. Having said that, there was a secondary purpose behind it - not a very practical one, but still a purpose. I've been a fan of *YM/YPM* since before I was a teenager (oh Lord, it began in 1980, how old am I?!) and I'd often recommended the series to people who'd never seen it. And the irritating response I'd get from so many of them would go along the lines of, "Oh, I've heard of that. It looks very good, sounds very clever, but I don't

think I'll bother. I don't think I'd understand it." A fair few people whom I've had that conversation with are *Knightmare* fans. So, in order to help them get on the wavelength, I've effectively written an episode of *Yes, Minister* but set it in Dunshelm, and my hope is that it can help a few of those fans understand it better, and maybe even take an interest in the series itself.

How long did the entire process of bringing the play to life (from the first draft to the finished MP3) take?

A bit like the timescale involved in creating *Famous For Retreating*, the answer to this question is deceptive, because of long spells of hiatus. I make it roughly two years and eight months.

The idea first came to me in early 2006, but I was so busy mixing *FFR* and writing the (at present, still unmade) script for *When Five Tribes Go To War* that I wasn't able to start scripting *YDM* until the following New Year. The first draft was written very quickly, not least because almost all of the jokes in it were lifted directly from episodes of *Yes, Minister*, and as any schoolboy will be able to attest, writing quickly is far easier when you're copyi-... er, I mean when you are *drawing research from* other sources. (Derivative? Our plays? *Neveeeeeer!*) The idea at that point was to record *YDM* as a secondary project at the same time as we were recording *Five Tribes*, which was scheduled for April that year. But then the recording week was postponed for the usual reasons - the dreaded withdrawals - although on the plus side, it gave me the opportunity to redraft the scripts quite substantially; *YDM* in its final form is far longer, with several extra scenes in the second half, and some of the early scenes greatly expanded. (Mainly, I was able to crowbar more jokes in, and make them a fair bit fresher too.) For instance, the scene with the Descender (played with such glorious, caution-free gusto by Rosey Collins) wasn't even written until the third draft, which was only completed in November 2007.

Two more postponements in 2008 led to all audio projects being shelved for about a year. This was except for Andy Marshall's *Bolt to the Head* sketch of course, which he'd written in February 2008, and which I eventually decided to use as the subject of an experiment in recording projects from home, instead of at studio meet-ups; it was launched in the New Year of 2009, and the end-product, although it did have some faults in it, proved of sufficient quality for me to bring *YDM* out of mothballs and to see if we could make it the same way. *If we can paste together a*

sketch with people recording the lines at home, we reasoned, we can do a play in the same fashion. I sent the script round to all the team-members, new and old, on New Year's Day, and gradually I was able to build a cast, essentially by letting the team play "bagsies" with the roles. I set a very relaxed and vague launch-target of late-summer/early-autumn, and then sat back and waited for the recordings to slowly trundle my way. There were a few cast changes along the way, due essentially to people finding that their home microphones were just too broken (or just plain bad quality) to produce a good recording, but the changes were accommodated easily. The first scene - Scene 2 (Merlin's cameo) - was mixed as early as March, although mixing in earnest didn't really begin until June. From there, it was a smooth-ish process, occasionally held up a little as I waited for the last few scraps of recordings to reach me. The only major obstacle was in trying to combat distortion on some of them, but I'd learned some new tricks for filtering out noise, and so the sound field, although still far from perfect, was already tidier than the one on *BTTH*. The final work was completed on September 2nd 2009, fully five days before launch on *Knightmare's* twenty-second anniversary.

How easy was it to assemble a cast for this play, and get hold of all the audio files?

It was a lot easier to assemble the cast than it was for previous projects. Because people would be recording from home, they didn't have to set aside entire weeks, or look into awkward or costly travel/accommodation arrangements, so drop-outs were a lot rarer. Also, the project was effectively allotted nine months for putting things together, whereas with *Bolt to the Head*, we'd only really given ourselves about five weeks from the time we decided to try experimenting with it. Despite the fact that there were still one or two problems with people having to withdraw, it was far easier to replace them this time, because (again) the substitute performers didn't have to make any tricky arrangements.

Getting the sound recordings was a piece of proverbial black forest gateau with lashings of vanilla whipped cream on top (rough translation: cake), as the cast could send them to me by e-mail or via MSN/Live Messenger. My e-mail server does have a slightly nervous spam-filter on it, which meant that sometimes the odd recording wouldn't get through, but even then it was just a matter of sending again.

Was there a point when you thought *YDM* might never be finished?

Only when the big recording meet-up kept getting postponed. (And I was

far more concerned about *Five Tribes* when it came to that.) Once the decision was made to record *YDM* from home, I never had the slightest inkling of doubt that it would be completed, and comfortably inside the schedule.

How do you feel about the finished play?

For the most part, it's a good job and a worthy end-result, especially given the very limited, basic facilities we've been using for it. I certainly find it entertaining enough to listen to, and I freely admit that it gives me a genuine chance to snigger at some of my own jokes.

But is it all it might have been? I'd have to say no. Maybe I'm too fussy (members of the RPG team are probably nodding their heads vigorously at this point, as I really got up a few of their noses some years back for being too quick to find fault in footage we were videoing for its sixth season), but I do wince a little at some of the distortion on the soundtrack. I managed to filter out the worst of it - believe me, it sounds a lot, *lot* worse on the raw recordings - and on most speakers what's left of it is almost inaudible. But when you listen to the play through quality headphones, the differences between microphones - and also some of the "breath-on-the-mic" and whatnot - are really obvious.

I also have to be brutally honest and say that, except with his Churchillian speech in Scene 7, I was none-too-wowed by Ruzl's performance. (Nor is Ruzl himself, for that matter.) Don't get me wrong, he certainly didn't do *badly*, but this is his weakest showing of the four he's done so far - at times, he sounds almost like he's giggling when he should instead sound exasperated, and at some other times, he seems to drift onto autopilot.

On the other hand, Rosey's cameo as the Descender - as I mentioned before - is extraordinary; Helen Beconsall makes for a wonderfully aggressive Majida (worthy successor to Sue McPherson, who, alas, has decided not to do any more *Knightmare* media projects); as Folly, Andy Marshall is so like Pickle that I wish I'd swapped the two characters back; and Jake Collins's performance is exactly how I always pictured a fusion of Hordriss and Sir Humphrey to be. (Special kudos for the marvellous delivery of, "Don't be *ridiculous*, Folly!")

What are your hopes and fears for producing future audio plays?

I suppose my biggest fear is a little like Jake Collins's occasional fear for

The Eye Shield, the paranoid impression when our labours are finally put on display to the public that no one's paying much notice. Mind you, I had that same suspicion when *Famous For Retreating* was released, and then David Forester ran a poll on the *Interactive Nightmare* website asking who had heard the play and what they thought of it, and within about a month, over seven hundred people had responded, and all of them positively. So I guess a lack of feedback should not be taken as condemnation.

My other fear is that the biggest project we've yet embarked on - *When Five Tribes Go To War* - might never be made. Home recording is fine for a comedy as there's a slightly shabby, rough-edged feel to it that does little actual harm and even adds to the amusement. But dramas are seriously-intended and demand more polish, and while our techniques for filtering noise have improved sharply, they don't fully compensate for low bitrates and varying distortion thresholds on different microphones. In short, if we're going to do a drama properly, we really would have to assemble at a recording studio and do the job together on solid equipment. It is proving unbelievably difficult finding a time for a large enough cast to meet up. Worse, the recession has really started to bite, including in the electronic media industry, and prices for hiring a recording studio have surged in the last three years or so. Even if a suitable date can be found for a full cast to attend, actually affording the studio (and accommodation and transport on top of it) will be another big obstacle.

It would be a real disappointment if *Five Tribes* were to be shelved permanently, as it's the only script I've produced for the *KM* Drama team that I'm anywhere near being happy with. With all this in mind, I guess we'll have to keep other options open...

LATE NEWS: Fear not, readers - production of *Five Tribes* is already underway and the play will be released sometime next year.

REMEMBER HIM?

Series 6. Level 1/2.

AH WOK

Ah Wok was a Chinese stallholder who turned up in Wolfenden at the start of series 6 and started to run Julius Scaramonger out of business. I would say that he is definitely Nightmare's iffiest character - you wouldn't see his like on TV nowadays, as such a character would undoubtedly be considered racist by some ultra-PC person out there in the ultra-PC world. Ah Wok was played by Mark Knight, wearing a lot of makeup and putting on a comical accent. Because it was Mark Knight, the character was actually funny in an ironic kind of way, but in the hands of any other actor, Ah Wok could well have just been embarrassing. I certainly don't think his inception was the finest hour of the Nightmare production team.

In terms of the wider plot of series 6, Ah Wok played a very significant part. The residents of Wolfenden - and dungeoneers too, of course - migrated in droves from Julius Scaramonger's stall to Ah Wok's, presumably because the Chinaman's wares were of better quality and more reasonably priced, which didn't really come as a surprise, given what we knew of Julius Scaramonger from series 5. This ultimately led to Scaramonger's financial and personal ruin, followed by his downward spiral into alcoholism. According to Pickle, Scaramonger became so desperate for funds that he sold his own mother as a washerwoman, but at least Mrs Scaramonger and all the little Scaramongers apparently stuck by him through it all, according to Julius's final, inebriated appearance with dungeoneer Chris in the penultimate episode of the series.

Perhaps if Ah Wok had not driven Julius out of business, he wouldn't have been forced to forge such a close alliance with Lord Fear - as you may remember, he was adamant that he did not want to join the Opposition at the end of series 5, when he had plenty of money coming in from both sides. Scaramonger's lack of involvement would certainly have put a dampener on the whole Red Death plan, and maybe more besides.

So, Ah Wok's influence on the Dungeon as a whole cannot be denied, unintentional as it may have been. After all, Ah Wok was doubtless only interested in market forces - he can't have known that he was having such a great effect on the power struggle between the Opposition and

the Powers that Be. Anyway, in more tangible terms, Ah Wok helped out with five of the seven quests in series 6. He sold Matt a dragon mint and the password in exchange for a bar of gold; he sold Sumayya a summoning spell in exchange for a bar of gold; he sold Ben a True Sight potion in exchange for a bar of gold; and he sold Chris a witch's robe and a broomstick in exchange for... a bag of gold, just to add a bit of variety!

Ah Wok's appearance with Alan was probably his most interesting, and it was a significant chapter in the saga of his rivalry with Julius Scaramonger. Julius had persuaded Lord Fear to send the spectral samurai to kill Ah Wok; when Alan's team dispelled the magic, the grateful Chinaman rewarded them with a bar of silver and the password in exchange for... a bar of gold, surprisingly enough!

As with Sir Hugh and Rothberry, Mark Knight did an excellent job of interacting with the dungeoneers, and making Ah Wok a character that was fun to watch. Whether or not he should have existed in the first place is a different matter, but I won't get into that. Ah Wok has never been one of my favourite characters, and I think I might absolutely hate him if he hadn't been played by Mark Knight, but as it is, I can't help but enjoy his appearances... not a lot, but enough to remark on it!

Fear Factor: 2 He was only ever threatening to Julius Scaramonger.

Killer Instinct: 0 Definitely a pacifist!

Humour Rating: 8 Humour was a big part of the character.

Oscar Standard: 7 Expertly played for laughs, but perhaps the whole concept of the character misfired slightly, if the truth be known.

KNIGHTMARE LOCATIONS

Weald and Downland Open Air Museum, Chichester, West Sussex

Location: Singleton, near Chichester, West Sussex.

AKA: Wolfenden, the Wolfglade and other village/forest locations.

Series featured in: 5 and 6.

These pictures were taken by me, Jake Collins, and scanned by Rosey Collins, in September 2008.

The door that leads into Greenshades inn; there must be a lot of thirsty punters by now, because it doesn't actually open:



If you want to get into this farmhouse, you have to use the front door, which should also be a familiar sight to Nightmare fans:



At the side of the farmhouse is the spot where Sylvester Hands tried to rob Richard II, and received several pixie bites for his trouble:



Next Issue: The Chiltern Open Air Museum.

A KNIGHTMARE HOLIDAY

By Drassil

The names of twenty Nightmare characters (one of them is more of a creature, actually) are hidden somewhere within the following tale of the idyllic sundrenched holiday of four fun-loving girls. How many can you find?

Morag, Olga, Rachel and Nita had gone on holiday. After considering destinations as diverse as India, Mali, Cephalonia and Anglesey, they had taken a suggestion from Rachel's stepbrother: Macedonia in Greece. It was the morning after, and as Morag walked into the living room of the apartment, the lingering aroma of tequila slammer linked her mind to the night before.

"I need more than a paracetamol after that night," she groaned. Casting a bleary-eyed and ultimately confused gaze across the room, she asked, "Is that Viagra Nita's holding?"

Rachel looked up from her John Wyndham book and sighed. "No. She's been picking out the blue Smarties again." Nita giggled.

Morag dropped onto the sofa, next to Olga, who was ready to quiz her. "So, Morag, do you regret elbowing that bloke?"

"What bloke?"

"Oh, no one important. Only the bouncer, who almost didn't let us in after that!"

"I remember now. Sorry about that, girls." She didn't, and she wasn't. "What about that guy you were talking to, Nita? The one with three mobile phones? Epic kleptomaniac if you ask me."

"I quite liked him!" replied Nita. "He claimed he was some disgraced rich kid who'd had a party and trashed his parents' divine manor, so they sent him to Greece to pick up some culture."

Rachel smirked. "Well, he got you. And that's a start."

Later, on the balcony, Rachel was continuing her John Wyndham book.

"How would we feel if we actually saw a Triffid: jittery? Excited? Curious?" she asked no one in particular.

"Bored," replied Morag, turning her attention back to her noodles. Morag ate masterfully with chopsticks, even when slightly drunk. "Even that book cover's boring, Rachel. Boredom, art and me go hand in hand, I admit it."

"I wish I had the stamina to read a novel daily," remarked Nita. She turned another glossy page of her magazine. (She had been reading about Eric Bana's car movie, *Love the Beast*, and the outrageous car among Eric's discoveries when he viewed comedian Jay Leno's car collection: a McLaren F1.) "This counts as reading, doesn't it? A mild read, at least?"

Rachel grimaced. "More like a bog read."

"Olga, why are you doing that?" asked Morag.

"Lest I let tables get dirty. My inner waitress won't accept that I'm on holiday," Olga replied. She put down the cloth. "Anyway, the fridge is a bit empty. Shall I make a pilgrimage to the supermarket?"

Rachel thought aloud again. "What would you say is the supermarket of choice for the discerning pilgrim? Aldi? Never Asda."

"Can you get ASBOs in Asda?" quipped Nita.

"I expect there's a way," replied Morag. "I'll ask my stepbrother. He got his ASBO at Manchester Crown Court. But I'm sure it's much the same."

WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG

Pre-school TV Shows of the 1980s IV

By Gehn "Lex" Luthor

The Mr. Men (from 31/12/1974):

Between 1971 and 1978, Roger Hargreaves wrote thirty-nine *Mr. Men* stories, twenty-eight of which appeared in the television show that was broadcast in the mid-seventies and narrated by Arthur Lowe. How frequently episodes were shown is unknown to me because my information suggests that books which did not appear until 1976 and 1978 were featured in the series, although other 1978 releases, such as *Mr. Tall* and *Mr. Wrong*, were not made. When Hargreaves died in 1988, his son Adam took over the writing, and in 1990, some new characters were introduced. It is perhaps a worrying sign of age that I can look through the original list of thirty-nine characters and picture every single one clearly in my mind, yet none of those created in 1990 and 2003 have any familiarity whatsoever.

Anyway, to the series, which was - of course - repeated during the '80s. Each episode told the story of an individual Mr. Man, whose name was an adjective which described his personality, and who physically resembled said adjective. For example, Mr. Greedy was an extremely fat man who was always hungry and Mr. Nosey had a very long nose and was always interfering in other people's affairs.

Those stories about characters with more negative names, such as Mr. Uppity and Mr. Noisy, tended to demonstrate that their personalities were a problem, meaning that they needed to be taught a lesson. As you can probably guess, Mr. Uppity was extremely rude and snooty, and the story focuses on goblins frightening him with magic in an attempt to make him mend his ways.

Those with more positive names, such as Mr. Happy and Mr. Small, would feature in stories where their personalities were used to help others or themselves. Mr. Funny did strange things such as drive around in a shoe to make people laugh, and in his story, he goes to the zoo to entertain all the animals because they are sick with colds, causing the zoo to be shut. I myself found all these stories very entertaining, as well as educational in the cases of the negative characters.

As well as the series and the books, there was (and still is) much

merchandise featuring the *Mr. Men*. Specific to the eighties was a board game called *Mr. Men Matching Pairs*, which featured two cards, each with four separate lay-outs, that slid under a grille. Each hole in the grille was covered with a plastic piece and the aim of the game was to match more pairs than your opponent.

There was also a set of yoghurts that featured the *Mr. Men*, and as far as I remember, they were extremely tasty. The flavours corresponded to the colour of the character, so Mr. Happy was banana, Mr. Messy was raspberry, Mr. Greedy was strawberry, Mr. Lazy was fudge and Mr. Uppity was chocolate. Who says we don't remember stuff from childhood?

Educational Value = 5/5.

Entertainment Value = 5/5.

Little Misses (1983):

Having looked at the *Mr. Men*, it would be scandalous to not now review the sister programme, the *Little Misses*. Roger Hargreaves did not have any *Little Miss* books published until 1981, when thirteen were released. These thirteen are also the ones that feature in the 1983 television series narrated by Pauline Collins and John Alderton. Other characters were created by Hargreaves in 1984, and again in 1990 and 2003 when Adam Hargreaves continued his father's work.

As with the *Mr. Men*, each of the Little Misses has a name which describes her personality, although there are not so many cases of characters physically resembling their names, perhaps because some of the adjectives, such as Bossy and Dotty, are not especially easy to depict.

Once again, there are positive and negative characters, although exact pairings with the *Mr. Men* are rare. Little Miss Plump is also known as Little Miss Greedy, but the only other (original) Little Miss with an exact partner amongst the *Mr. Men* is Little Miss Chatterbox. However, unlike her twin, her loquaciousness is put to good use. Whereas Mr. Chatterbox obtains a magic hat that expands to shroud him every time he starts chattering, Little Miss Chatterbox puts her voice to good use by working as the equivalent of the speaking clock.

While some pairings, such as the Chatterboxes, have very different stories, there are others whose stories are very similar. For example, Little Miss Sunshine is the Little Miss who is most closely related to Mr.

Happy. Mr. Happy is mentioned in her story, and apparently, in the 2008 series *The Mr. Men Show*, she and Mr. Happy present a morning show called *Good Morning Dillydale*. I cannot claim to know anything about this because I have not seen any *Mr. Men* or *Little Miss* programmes in some twenty years, besides which I am most likely to be extremely snobby about any updates - anyone who has been following these articles will know how I feel when decent shows get modernised! Anyway, to get back to the point, both Mr. Happy and Little Miss Sunshine convert misery into joy. Mr. Happy cheers Mr. Miserable up (an episode I do remember - who could forget what was effectively Mr. Happy with a sad face?), while Little Miss Sunshine converts Miseryland to Laughterland.

The educational aspect of the *Little Misses* is identical to that of the *Mr. Men*, inasmuch as negative characters (such as Little Miss Trouble and Little Miss Naughty) are taught lessons in an attempt to improve their personalities, whereas the more positive ones (such as Little Miss Sunshine) use their personalities for the benefit of themselves and others.

For whatever reason, I remember much less about this series than I do about the *Mr. Men*. I do not know whether this is because there were fewer episodes (thirteen, rather than twenty-eight) or because they were repeated less frequently, but I do know that it would be nice to see the originals of both series once again.

Educational Value = 5/5.

Entertainment Value = 5/5.

Bagpuss (1974):

This classic, created and produced by Peter Firmin and Oliver Postgate of *Smallfilms*, was voted the best children's show ever in 1998. It also came fourth in the 2001 Channel 4 documentary *The 100 Greatest Kids' TV Shows* (in which *Nightmare* came sixteenth) so for those reasons alone, it is worthy of a place in this article, even if it is strictly a '70s - rather than an '80s - production.

The fact that I vaguely remember watching it suggests that it, like *The Flumps*, was repeated during the '80s, but nowhere near as frequently as *Postman Pat* or *Chock-A-Block*. We certainly never had it on video, so my theory is that no more repeats were shown (at least during the afternoon slot) after 1985 or 1986.

So, what was *Bagpuss* about? The show was set in a shop owned by a little girl named Emily. This shop did not sell anything but displayed lost property that Emily had found so that the rightful owner might recognise it and claim it. Each episode began with Emily finding something that was broken and placing it in front of Bagpuss, who was a pink and white striped saggy cloth cat. (As an aside, my information suggests that the classic pink colour for which Bagpuss is so well remembered was actually an error. He was supposed to be ginger marmalade, but the dyeing company made a mistake.)

Anyway, once the item was placed in front of Bagpuss, Emily asked him to fix it and then walked away. Up until this point, all thirteen episodes were identical, inasmuch as the same narrative and sepia photographs were used. Bagpuss would then wake up, heralding a change from sepia photographs to colour, stop-frame animation. We were then introduced to the other characters, who would come to life when Bagpuss woke up. There were two dolls: a ragdoll called Madeleine and a toad call Gabriel. The wooden bookend that was shaped as a woodpecker became Professor Yaffle, and the carvings on the "mouse organ" became mice.

Everyone would look at the object and try to determine what needed to be done with it. In the first episode, entitled *The Ship in a Bottle*, Yaffle is unable to see what is inside the bottle, so the mice clean it. Pieces of a broken ship are tipped out, prompting a song from Gabriel. Yaffle says that the song was completely pointless because it did not put the ship back together again, so the toys agree that Bagpuss needs to fix it by means of a magic story. Therefore, he dons a captain's cap and tells the story of how he was once shipwrecked, and how mermaids used magic to put his ship back together. By the end of the story, the ship has been fixed, so the mice put it back in the bottle and it goes on display in the shop window.

Each episode ran according to these parameters, and once the object was fixed and on display, Bagpuss yawned and went back to sleep. Once again, from this point on, all episodes were identical, with sepia photographs making a return and all the characters becoming toys again. Simple yet entertaining, *Bagpuss* was unforgettable, whether because of the high-pitched squeaking of the mice, the character of Yaffle, or the psychedelic colours of Bagpuss.

Finally, there are currently rumours going around about the possibility of

Bagpuss returning soon. There are a variety of articles that both support and refute such rumours, so nothing is for certain. Anyhow, as I am sure many of you will agree, a rebirth could either work extremely well or be an absolute disaster. Re-creation on the scale of *Postman Pat* would be a non-starter in my view, while applying only subtle changes to the original would work better. I guess we must wait and see, although if it does come back, it will probably be shown on the CBBC Channel, or even on CBeebies, meaning that analogue stalwarts who have only the basic four channels (my television is nearly as old as *Bagpuss*) will be denied a viewing.

Educational Value = 2/5.

Entertainment Value = 5/5.

Mop and Smiff (1985):

I allowed myself to talk about *Bagpuss* for a little longer than usual for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, it was good enough to deserve that extra time and analysis (who says that being voted the best children's show ever is not without reward?) but secondly, information on the final two items for this issue is extremely sparse, and much of what I say will have to be dredged up from my original memory of the programmes. Therefore, if anything you subsequently read rings any bells and you see some great omissions on my part, please contact TES as we would love to know more about these shows.

Mop and Smiff, then. This show was written and presented by Mike Amatt, who also created *Forget-Me-Not Farm* a few years later. If the latter sounds more familiar, then you will have a vague idea as to the format of *Mop and Smiff*, inasmuch as the first half was set in "real life" while the second half showed an animated story. Rather than describing life on a farm, *Mop and Smiff* introduced Amatt's pets, Mop the dog and Smiff the cat, and the first half of each episode would centre around the animals' lives and what they would get up to during the day. There were probably some tips about caring for pets during this section as well, although I cannot be sure.

The animated part would feature Mop and Smiff as cartoon animals who had some sort of adventure or found a problem that needed solving. I believe that Mike Amatt voiced both characters, but once again, I am far from certain of this.

I do not recall seeing this programme especially frequently and, as with *Bagpuss*, I am certain that we never recorded any episodes. This would

suggest that it may not have been repeated, and that its original run in 1985 was in fact its only run. As I remember, the animated stories were fairly entertaining, but if indeed it was shown only once, I would have been four years old when I saw it, so the real-life bits would not really have appealed to me, even though they were very educational.

Interestingly, a spin-off series called *Mike, Mop and the Moke* was made, in which Mike and Mop visited seaside towns in a 1965 Moke. Well, so I have read. I have no recollection of this programme whatsoever. The only other thing I can tell you about *Mop and Smiff* is that thirteen episodes were made, but then you already knew that, did you not?

Educational Value = 5/5.

Entertainment Value = 3/5.

Hokey Cokey (1983):

The scanty review of *Mop and Smiff* will look like a library compared to what I can tell you about *Hokey Cokey*. Indeed, it was not until I wrote to our editor-in-chief to suggest this series of articles that I even remembered the programme myself, for he said how he was looking forward to hearing about such shows as *Hokey Cokey*.

What I can tell you is that twenty-six episodes were made and that it featured Chloe Ashcroft and Don Spencer, with Carol Chell starring in the earlier episodes. Ben Thomas may well have appeared in it also, which could be why I tended to associate it with *Play School*. There were also two puppets who used to sit at the side and make comments. One was called Hokey, was male and had brown hair; the other was called (yes, you've guessed it!) Cokey, was female and had yellow hair. Well, I believe those were their genders, anyway. There was a lot of singing and dancing, and I believe at one point they did actually do the Hokey Cokey, although whether this happened in every episode is beyond my knowing.

Repeats must have been few and far between for so few people to remember it (not even my mum can). It was possibly shown on a Thursday, and may have had two episodes a week, given that there were twenty-six in total rather than thirteen. However, much of this is speculation, so the ratings I am going to give are based purely on what I can remember, so may seem unfair to anyone who knows a lot more about it.

Educational Value = 2/5.

Entertainment Value = 3/5.

1988 was the final year in which the *See-Saw* term was officially used. From 1989, although a lunchtime slot was still reserved for children, the programmes were placed under the banner of *Children's BBC*. While some of the classics (*Postman Pat*, *Mr. Benn*) were still shown, other programmes that had originally been on during the late afternoon (*Greenclaws*, *Philomena*) were moved to the *See-Saw* slot. In the coming issues, we shall be having a look at some of these programmes, which perhaps the slightly younger readers of TES will remember more vividly.

KIDS' TV SHOWS I GREW UP WITH

Focus on: Thundercats.

Original Broadcast Run: January 1985 - December 1986.

UK TV Channels: BBC1, BBC2.

From beyond any known galaxy come... the Thundercats! Bringing with them the laws and ideals of their doomed planet Thundera... well, that's because Thundera was - for some reason - about to blow up, and the Thundercats - a race of beings basically humanoid in nature, but possessing the skills and abilities of various cat species - were introduced to us essentially as space refugees. Aboard the Thunderan flagship were the following Thundercats - Lion-o, Tygra, Cheetara, Panthro, Wily Kit, Wily Kat and Jaga. Snarf was also there, of course, but technically speaking he's not a Thundercat - he's a Snarf!

Each Thundercat had a special skill that related to the cat on which they were based. Tygra possessed the ability to become invisible, like a tiger camouflaging in the grass, while Cheetara could run at incredible speeds, very much like a cheetah. Panthro's special talent was his great strength (are panthers noted for being particularly strong?) while Jaga's special skill was his wisdom... and we all know how wise jaguars are, don't we? As for Lion-o, his special skill was... being the leader! Yes, like so many leaders, that was the only innate skill that Lion-o apparently had... but I guess that kinda fits in with the lion being King of the Beasts.

Wily Kit and Wily Kat, meanwhile, were highly skilled in agility and trickery. Whenever you read anything about the two so-called "Thunderkittens" it will invariably mention that they are twins, which is a concept that I found hard to grasp for many years simply because it seemed to me that Wily Kit was an adolescent lioness, while Wily Kat was an adolescent tiger. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that Wily Kat's voice sounds very like Tygra's, while Wily Kit's costume is very similar to Lion-o's (as is her hair) but I've read up on this and apparently the twins are from the same species - the wildcat. Doesn't say much for the Thundercats' future breeding prospects, does it? If the only two youngsters are twins, who are they going to mate with? It would be a bit like Albert Square with only Peter and Lucy Beale left...

So, the Thundercats were in quite a quandary - their planet had blown up, they were being attacked by the Mutants from the planet Plundar (their

long-standing enemies) and they needed a new home. And the home they eventually found was Earth, albeit in the far distant future, after the human race has seemingly died out. The Thundercats were forced to make the trip to Earth in suspension capsules, as it was so far away. Jaga, of course, refused to join the others in the capsules because he was so old, and because the ship needed to be piloted manually for as long as possible, as it was so badly damaged. Lion-o's suspension capsule was apparently a faulty one, as he aged ten years during the journey, conveniently making him just the right size to wield the Sword of Omens, which Jaga had given to him on the ship. The Sword of Omens (as I'm sure everyone knows) played host to the Eye of Thundera, the magical source of the Thundercats' power.

Anyway, the Thundercats eventually settled on Earth (or Third Earth, as they called it) and built themselves a new home in the shape of the Cats' Lair, with the help of their new friends, the Robear-burbils. Jaga regularly appeared to Lion-o as a kind of ghost (no one else could see him) and continued to advise him about how to be the Lord of the Thundercats, while the three leaders of the Mutants (Jackalman, Monkian and Slythe, who was a reptilian and the only mutant important enough to have a proper name) also settled on Third Earth and built Castle Plundar, a base of evil from which they could continue to antagonise the Thundercats and try to get their wicked hands on the Eye of Thundera.

Now, it's confession time - when I was looking at my list of shows to examine in detail for this feature, I came across Thundercats and thought, "What the hell did I put that one in for? I don't like it that much!" Yes, for though I used to enjoy watching Thundercats during *Going Live!* (and sometimes on CBBC in the afternoons) I wouldn't call it one of my absolute faves by any stretch of the imagination. Then I remembered - the one reason that I always watched Thundercats was to see Mumm-Ra! In my opinion, Mumm-Ra is the greatest ever cartoon villain! He could have slotted into any cartoon and made it ten times better than it otherwise would have been. He had no specific history with the Thundercats - he just wanted to possess the power of the Eye of Thundera because he happened to appear as the main villain in their cartoon!

Mumm-Ra was an undead mummy who lived (if that's the right word) in a super creepy pyramid tomb. He spent most of his time asleep in a

sarcophagus, and when he emerged he was wrapped up in bandages and a red cloak with a cowl. He kept an eye on what the Thundercats were up to in his giant bubbling cauldron, and when he saw an opportunity to get his hands on the Eye of Thundera, he would proclaim, "Ancient Spirits of Evil, transform this decayed form to Mumm-Ra, the Ever Living!" Ooh, I'm getting goosebumps just thinking about it!

Mumm-Ra's magic was incredibly powerful and in his Ever Living form, he was impossible to defeat physically - only the evil in his own reflection could ward him off. He was also impossible to kill, as every time the Thundercats thought they were finally rid of Mumm-Ra forever, he would come back to life and proclaim, "As long as evil exists, Mumm-Ra lives!" Now if that isn't cool, I don't know what is! Mumm-Ra and the Mutants were ostensibly on the same side, as they had made an unholy alliance to work together and share the power of the Eye of Thundera, but I always found the Mutants very poor excuses for villains compared to Mumm-Ra.

Early episodes of Thundercats focused on the trials and tribulations of settling in to life on Third Earth, being antagonised by Mumm-Ra and the Mutants from time to time, and this is how I always remember the basic premise of the show. However, apparently this situation is just the thin end of the wedge. For the show's second season, three new Thundercats were introduced - blind Lynx-o, sexy Pumyra and blue-and-white Tygra clone Ben Gali. I am absolutely convinced that I never saw any episodes with these three on the BBC, although I do remember seeing the Ben Gali action figure in the Argos catalogue and other such places and thinking, "Oh look, a white Tygra figure." (It is worth noting that calling a white tiger Ben Gali is not actually a particularly clever thing to do, as Bengal tigers are not usually white. White tigers are caused by a gene mutation, and can belong to any tiger subspecies.)

But this is not where the changes end, apparently. Later seasons involve the Thundercats meeting up with other survivors from Thundera (all of whom were explicitly supposed to have been killed by the Mutants in the first episode) and settling on another planet - New Thundera! New Mutants and other villains are also introduced, meaning that some original characters have their screen-time severely reduced. Now, if this isn't straying from your roots, I don't know what is! You may remember that I made my feelings on this matter abundantly clear quite recently in an article called *The Top is High*, and after reading about how far this show seemingly strayed from its original premise - and hearing some of the

gory details from Liam Callaghan - I now know that I never want to see these later shows!

So, Thundercats - a good cartoon with an excellent main villain, although the existence of all series after the first should be completely disregarded. I will always remember this show as being a significant part of my childhood (mainly the Saturday morning parts) but I don't really have any particular fondness for it. Having said that, I will always think of Mumm-Ra as the scariest, coolest evildoer on TV, and nothing will ever change my mind about that!

KIDS' TV SHOWS I DIDN'T GROW UP WITH...

But now enjoy!

By Ricky Temple

In this day and age Retro has become the popular thing, with old trends and fads becoming "cool" again. Also prospering from this Retro trend are old toy lines and old TV shows. Plus with the invention and perfecting of the DVD format, old TV shows that never got a release in the old VHS format are now being released for both old fans and a new generation of them to enjoy.

In this three-part series I am going to review some shows which:

- a) I never saw during their original broadcast run but now, thanks to DVD, I am an avid fan of.
- b) Were broadcast before I was born and I have only now seen due to DVD.
- c) I did watch when I was younger but didn't really fully understand or like, but now - having seen them again on DVD - I have become a fan of.

Dark Season (1991):

This sci-fi show for kids was written by Russell T Davis (of Doctor Who executive producer and chief writer fame) and there is a definite hint of Doctor Who influence. It revolves around a group of three schoolchildren - Marcie, Thomas, and Reet, played by a young Kate Winslet in her first major TV acting role. Marcie was the youngest of the group, but was also the cleverest and the leader - cynical, eccentric, otherworldly at times and caustically sarcastic... sounds rather like a certain Time Lord, doesn't it? She leads her friends into confrontations with the evil and sinister Mr Eldritch, who seeks to destroy order and bring chaos.

The first three episodes revolve around Eldritch and his henchman Dr Osley in their attempts to brainwash the children of Marcie's school, using a special symbiotic computer program - developed by a Cold War scientist - as a test run for eventually releasing the program on the whole world. The three children - along with one of their teachers, Miss Maitland, and the scientist - cause the program to destroy itself and apparently Mr Eldritch and Dr Osley along with it.

The next three (and sadly final) episodes involve a plot apparently masterminded by the Neo-Nazi archeologist Miss Pendragon and her Aryan assistant Inga to unearth an old Second World War supercomputer

called Behemoth. However, it turns out that once again pulling the strings is the sinister Mr Eldritch, who quickly dispenses with the Neo-Nazis and tries to use Behemoth for his own ends. However Marcie manages to convince the sentient Behemoth to reject him, which leads to Behemoth going into meltdown and bursting into flames. As Marcie is escaping she sees that Eldritch has once again also managed to escape. Miss Pendragon, however, throws herself into her beloved Behemoth and is pulled down with it.

Dark Season was a 1991 replacement for Maid Marion and Her Merry Men, which was on a year's break at the time. It was never intended to be anything else, yet it is one of those shows that was crying out for and deserved a sequel. As it is, it stands as an early example of how good Russell T Davis's writing can be when he gets it right, and as an example of a promising and potentially successful show being cut off before it even has a chance to really get going.

Dark Season was released on DVD on July 24th 2006.

MASK (1985-1986):

MASK (short for Mobile Armoured Strike Kommand) was another of those '80s cartoons that has a toy line to promote - in this case a combination of two of the biggest toy lines of that decade, Transformers and GI Joe. It would run for two years and three seasons, totalling seventy-five episodes. However, while still being a vehicle for toy sales, it managed to be an enjoyable cartoon.

The basic premise of MASK is that Matt Tracker (the leader of the MASK team) is seeking to bring down the criminal organisation known as VENOM (Vicious Evil Network Of Mayhem) and its leader Miles Mayhem, after Mayhem had been responsible for the death of Matt's brother Andy. The "gimmick" of MASK was that each character had their own Battle MASK with a special power and (a la Transformers) a vehicle that transformed into a fighting machine of some sort.

The first two seasons saw Matt Tracker (along with fellow MASK agents Alex Sector, Gloria Baker, Dusty Hayes, Bruce Sato and Hondo MacLean, as well as Matt's son Scott and his robot friend T-Bob) travelling all over the world foiling Miles Mayhem and his VENOM Agents, Vanessa Warfield, Sly Rax and Cliff Dagger. Later on in season two, these three would be joined by Floyd "Birdman" Malory and "Goon" Nash Gorey, and by

the end of season two, Dagger had been faded out to be replaced by Bruno "Mad Dog" Shepherd.

The third series saw a completely different format being implemented - MASK now battled VENOM in races, usually for some "MacGuffin" item that would allow VENOM to achieve their aims. This season only lasted for ten episodes and saw some characters (like Gloria Baker and Scott & T-Bob from the MASK side, and Sly Rax from VENOM) being dropped altogether in favour of those who had not been big players in the original series (such as Buddy "Clutch" Hawks) or for new characters such as Lester "the Lizard" Sludge and Boris "the Tsar" Bushkin.

Even Matt Tracker and Miles Mayhem were relegated from starring roles, with Vanessa Warfield now seeming to run VENOM on a day-to-day basis, while Matt and Miles focused on their own personal rivalry in which Mayhem was aided and abetted by his weak willed twin brother Maximus "Maxi" Mayhem.

Another oddity about season three is the fact that the obligatory public service announcements that were tacked onto the end of the shows were sometimes delivered by the villains. Season three was to be MASK's last, as with the fall from grace of both Transformers and GI Joe, their "illegitimate offspring" also suffered and ceased to be, with the cartoon ending in 1986, and the toy line two years later in 1988.

Like I said, MASK was undeniably a vehicle to sell toys, but it (like a number of these sorts of cartoons) managed to rise above that to a certain degree of success, and has stood the test of time so that today (without the toy line being around) it can be enjoyed as a simple action-packed cartoon.

MASK Volume One was released on August 31st 2009, with Volume Two following on September 26th.

PUZZLE PAGE TWO

Going For Nightmare III

In the style of former BBC One and current Channel Five gameshow Going For Gold, the following descriptions are all worth a maximum of four points. Ask former ITN newsreader John Suchet (or, if you can't find him, ask someone else) to read each question to you and try to shout out the correct answer as soon as possible. If you answer correctly whilst your questioner is reading out the pink section, you get four points. If you answer correctly whilst your questioner is reading out the green section, you get three points. If you answer correctly whilst your questioner is reading out the blue section, you get two points. If you answer correctly whilst your questioner is reading out the red section, you get one point. Tot up your score out of forty at the end and see how well you did!

- 1) I am a Nightmare character who first appeared in series 2. I also appeared in series 3. I was supposed to appear in series 1, but I didn't quite make it, and I also appeared in series 4. Beginning with M, I am... who?
- 2) I am a Nightmare creature that first appeared in series 1. During this appearance, I was confused by a clue object. I made further appearances in series 2 and 3. Beginning with W, I am a Cavern... what?
- 3) I am a dungeoneer from series 2. My wall monster was Igneous; I also met Lillith, the Troll and Gumboil on level one. My team was the first that was entirely female. Beginning with C, I am... who?
- 4) I am a Nightmare puzzle from series 7. I did not involve any kind of sliding floor. I killed two dungeoneers. Beginning with S, I am the Trial by... what?
- 5) I am a clue object that first appeared in series 5. My final appearance was in series 8. All dungeoneers in series 5, 6, 7 and 8 used me at least once. Beginning with S, I am a... what?
- 6) I am a Nightmare character from series 3. I appeared on level one only. My son made an appearance in series 6. Beginning with G, I am Mrs... who?

7) I am a Nightmare creature from series 2. I made all but one of my appearances on level two; the other was at the very end of level one. I killed the first dungeoneer I encountered. Beginning with W, I am a Cavern... what?

8) I am a dungeoneer from series 1. I made it to level two. My wall monster was Olgarth. Beginning with S, I am... who?

9) I am a Nightmare obstacle from series 2. I was always encountered on level two. I made two further appearances during the second half of series 3. Beginning with D, I am the Mills of... what?

10) I am a clue object that first appeared in series 1. I continued to appear on clue tables throughout Nightmare's run, but I was seldom used after series 3. I have been used by dungeoneers on chests and doors. Beginning with K, I am a... what?

SCANDINAVIAN NIGHTMARES:

<u>LEVEL THREE, ROOM ONE: GAUNTLET</u>	
TEXT REFERENCE	NOTE
<i>"What do you think I'm doing?" Lord Fear responded. "Surely you didn't expect that old giffer Mogdred to be wheeled out of the nursing home at this kind of short notice? Especially since all he'd do would be to appear and command these puny human adolescents to..." He put on his best mocking voice. "...look upon Mogdred and quail. Oh yes, terrifying, I'm sure. Besides, without me, who would supply the snappy, sarcastic lines that I'm so good at? I'm going to enjoy having some unscripted dialogue for a change. Those spyglass sequences were getting just a bit too predictable."</i>	<p>This paragraph explains exactly why I picked Lord Fear as the central baddie in this quest (other than the head of the production team...) and not Mogdred. It had nothing to do with writing this after the death of John Woodnutt - as Lord Fear implies here, Mogdred was something of a one-dimensional character, appearing far less frequently than Merlin did - they were supposed to be two sides of the same character, and to this day Merlin's slide downwards towards being a whimpering, pathetic figure who was usually trapped in the stocks during series 4 (why didn't he just magic himself out of them?) leaves a foul taste in my mouth. Lord Fear, by contrast, despite the pre-filmed nature of the spyglass sequences, brought a new level of snappy sarcasm to the quests, frequently punctuating his monologues with derogatory impersonations of both his henchmen and adversaries (Hordriss, Lissard and Skarkill spring immediately to mind). This was an excellent chance to investigate how Lord Fear would react to some of the situations from early quests.</p>

<p><i>"...Spellcasting, G-A-U-N-T-L-E-T!"</i> <i>With one swift sound of the jangly spell noise, skull ghosts started to rise from the piles of bones.</i></p>	<p>In case anyone has forgotten, a pile of bones in <i>Gauntlet</i> (certainly the first two games, not sure about the third) was a ghost generator. In <i>Knightmare</i>, these piles of bones would spring upwards to form complete skeletons - which didn't move from the spot they formed from, so appeared to be very little threat, other than to scare the advisers.</p>
<p><u>LEVEL THREE, ROOM TWO: THE FINAL CLUE ROOM</u></p>	
TEXT REFERENCE	NOTE
<p><i>"I've rigged level 3 so that you will need all three objects to survive. And as the rules state you can only carry two objects..."</i></p>	<p>Of course, you don't think I'm going to let <i>this</i> detail scupper the team's chances, do you? Besides, the object they leave behind is, again, one of the reasons why I wrote this episode in the first place.</p>
<p><i>"The path ahead lies through the right-hand door, where you will die."</i></p>	<p>This is a covert reference to <i>Blackadder III</i>. "I challenge you to a duel tonight at 1800 hours in which you will die. Yours, with sincere apologies for your impending violent slaughter, Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington."</p>
<p><i>"I've got the horn," Gunnar answered.</i></p>	<p>This is an obscure, but true, <i>Knightmare</i> moment. "Dickon's got the horn, Master!" said Pickle, excitedly, referring to the very amusingly-named Dickon Hares, the only triumphant dungeoneer of series 4, as he picked up a horn. Unfortunately, this was cut from the final edit.</p>
<p><u>LEVEL THREE, ROOM THREE: THE DRAGON VERSUS THE BROLLACHAN</u></p>	
TEXT REFERENCE	NOTE

<i>To everyone's surprise, not least that of the production team behind the scenes who thought they'd lost the required software, the Brollachan appeared to the sound of an Oriental gong, with a scant disregard for being another invading character from a later series.</i>	For it is written in the rules of the Greater Game, call three times and the character will appear. Even if that character is from a later series. Again, this is all down to Gunnar's lightning-quick thinking.
<i>"I... hunger..." drawled the Brollachan. "Feed... me... with... knowledge. Who... am... I... and... what... is... my... purpose... here?"</i>	I consider it fortunate that the Brollachan only appeared in one series. He spoke so slowly that his scenes were painfully drawn out.
<i>"You're the Brollachan, and you've been sent by Lord Fear to slay the dragon, Smirkenorff. See, there's a dragon. That's Smirkenorff. Destroy him!"</i>	Gunnar, of course, knows that the Brollachan does <i>not</i> know this isn't Smirkenorff.
<u>LEVEL THREE, ROOM FOUR: CAVERNWIGHTS</u>	
TEXT REFERENCE	NOTE
<i>"...I think those beans are making their way through my system... I don't feel too good..."</i>	As things get even more bizarre in this reality, we should also remind ourselves that Gunnar put the entire tin into the knapsack, and presumably this is being magically digested too...
<u>LEVEL THREE, ROOM FIVE: GUNNAR OUTWITS MEDUSA</u>	
TEXT REFERENCE	NOTE
<i>"Extrrrrrrrreme warning, team, this is the face of Medusa!" bawled Treguard hysterically. "Stare at it too long and you will be turned to stone!"</i>	This is how I'd rather mistakenly remembered Treguard's "advice" to the team in question from the first time I saw it. Later on, I found he was a bit more restrained than this. But not much.
<i>"...my mum forced me to take her to the roller disco at the church hall."</i>	I know I swiped this from somewhere - a Metal Hammer review, I think, of an album that was the equivalent of a scenario as awful as this one. Of course, the mere mention of the roller disco led me onto one of my favourite analogies...

<p><i>...clutching the walls of the church hall and pulling himself pathetically round...</i></p>	<p>Some people say I have a head for useless knowledge, and I have a habit of proving them right. Although it is getting on for 15 years ago now, I still remember reading the opening sentences of Chris Buxton's review of <i>NHLPA Hockey</i> for the Super Nintendo in the fabulously cartoony <i>Total!</i> magazine. And I quote: "Well, I admit I've never played ice hockey in my life. The closest I ever came was clutching the side of the local rink and pulling myself pathetically round."</p>
<p><i>"Gunnar, turn round and face the other way," Håkon commanded. (...) "I mean, why didn't Chris' advisers from series two think of all turning round the other way? They could have turned him round, then guided him backwards while guessing where he was, then turned back round to have a quick look..."</i></p>	<p>And here we have the third incident that caused me to write this series. First I had Håkon, then Dave, conveying my exact thoughts. Chris, the third dungeoneer of series 2, was the first to meet the Medusa, and the only one to fall foul of its stony stare. There was not even the slightest hint in the level 3 clue room that they had to take the shield, which is partially why I had Gunnar leave it there (not just to make the "have you got the horn?" joke). "Stare at it too long and you will be turned to stone," Treguard screeched hysterically at them, "...and the Helmet of Justice only delays the effect!" It didn't occur to Chris's team at the time to turn him round; it probably didn't occur to anyone. Only, when I was watching many years later in my late twenties, <i>that's</i> when I had the idea! So, of course, I sent Gunnar into the Medusa room, deliberately missing the shield, to put this scenario right. There was bound to have been some rule at the time that Chris couldn't turn round, as it could have been seen as violating the "no turning back" rule, but he would not have been moving backwards through the Dungeon...</p>

<p><i>"I think here, we're dealing with a team of superior intellect and you're just jealous because you went to..."</i></p>	<p>Looking at this again, I have no idea whatsoever if I meant to finish it with "...art college!" or some other education-related insult, or whether it was a typo and Dave meant to say "...because you <i>want</i> to..." continued with "...finish them off because they're pissing you off too much!" I think it may have been the art college insult.</p>
<p><u>LEVEL THREE, ROOM SIX: GARGOYLE TROUBLE</u></p>	
<p>TEXT REFERENCE</p>	<p>NOTE</p>
<p><i>"Unless you can cheer him up, you'll perish here... (...) ...all I can tell you is that his name is Mug."</i></p>	<p>Of all the teams who faced Mug, you really have to feel for Richard and his band of merry Yorkshiremen, the team I've previously mentioned in the "fire exit" room. As the only team of series 1 to reach level 3, they were the guinea pigs for the entire level, and were thrust into a meeting with Mug where Treguard issued the exact warning I've highlighted. "You're really handsome," Richard said to the obviously male gargoyle. "You're the most beautiful creature I've ever met, your eyes are a beautiful colour..." He can't have been any older than 13, and at that age, spouting some worryingly homo-erotic dialogue on national TV is about the last thing he'd want to be doing. Even that is a walk in the park compared with the hazard that Mug presents to a team of two misanthropes and a man so vain he could only appreciate his own reflection. Of all the rooms to be dropped in, this is probably the worst.</p>

<i>It sounded like a woman shrieking in the distance... and that distance grew ever shorter and the shriek grew louder until Mellisandre dropped seemingly out of nowhere, straight into Gunnar's arms, narrowly avoiding being impaled on the horns of the Helmet of Justice.</i>	Did any of you ever wonder what happened to Mellisandre on those all-too-common occasions she fell through a trap door? Wonder no longer.
<i>"Am I glad to see you," Gunnar answered. "Or at least I would be if I wasn't wearing this helmet."</i>	At this point I'm very annoyed that I missed a gem from Cocky Matt that I could have dropped neatly in here. "I can't see an awful lot; I've got an urn on my head, don't forget..."
<i>"Oh, Nigel, I thought I'd lost you forever..."</i>	If Edmund Blackadder had ever met Mellisandre, he would undoubtedly have described her as "wetter than a haddock's bathing costume". Consequently, the only boyfriend she could ever have had would most likely have been a lifeless nerd with John Major's adenoidal voice. I've always said Nigel and Colin are the nerdiest names in the history of the world, so it had to be one of those...
<u>LEVEL THREE, ROOM SEVEN: THE WALLS OF JERICO</u>	
TEXT REFERENCE	NOTE
<i>"It's a bacon sandwich," (...) The life force clock turned green - and froze in its starting position.</i>	I am a great supporter of the bacon sandwich as the ultimate life-giver; its healing powers are far beyond what can be expected from anything else. Freezing the life force clock was the best way to show this.
<u>LEVEL THREE, ROOM EIGHT: THE CORRIDOR OF BLADES</u>	
TEXT REFERENCE	NOTE

<i>"Gunnar, when I give you a direction, you are to throw yourself at that wall. Got it?"</i>	I mentioned Giles, the final dungeoneer of series 4, in the Mills of Doom, referring to him putting a spanner in the works. His attempt at the Corridor of Blades was the most memorable of the successful attempts, because of the way he jumped right out of the way of the approaching blades and scrunched himself up in a ball on the floor.
<i>A blade on the left wall shot past him at knee-height, accompanied by a simultaneous head height blade on the right wall, passing directly above him.</i>	I saw Jim's "Mistaken Memories" (which I refer you to here) as a work-in-progress at the time I was writing this, and having mentioned Giles's antics in the Corridor of Blades, I thought I'd bring his mistaken memory to life. I reckon I could draw the scene better than Stick-o-Vision, though.
<i>Before the next blade approached, he spread himself out flat on the conveyor belt, face down. The next blade, just one low one approaching on the left, passed right over him with no hint of contact.</i>	It's another "why didn't they..." scenario. Did no dungeoneer ever think of doing this? The low blades were all at knee-height and would have passed over all but the fattest dungeoneer lying on the conveyor.
<i>"Maybe I could get Martin Walkyier to agree to it."</i>	Richard O'Brien and Ed Tudor-Pole were linked by both taking the same part in <i>The Rocky Horror Show</i> , in the same order that they presented <i>The Crystal Maze</i> . For a potential third host, I had to think of someone suitably eccentric in mannerisms and dress sense and with a link to the previous host. Tenuous though it is, that link is there; just before Martin left Skyclad, they covered Tenpole Tudor's <i>Swords Of A Thousand Men</i> with Ed on guest vocals.
<u>LEVEL THREE, ROOM NINE: THE FINAL SHOWDOWN</u>	
TEXT REFERENCE	NOTE

<p><i>"I can't believe you have the temerity to come this far," Lord Fear sneered. "I mean, the very idea. Remember, it's not the taking part that counts, it's the winning. And winning is something I've very good at. You can take the sword if you want, but you will never make it back to Nightmare Castle. As soon as you touch it, I will strike you down with a huge fireball. So, instead, I'll watch you starve, as that bacon sandwich has to run out sometime. And, as I said before, I will gloat. Because nothing gives me more pleasure than oooooOOOOFFF!" Lord Fear was cut short mid-gloat by Gunnar headbutting him square in the jaw.</i></p>	<p>Very few dungeoneers ever met Lord Fear in person, and when they did, it was usually the final confrontation before victory. This ending is... let's call it a <i>tribute</i> to Ben II's final march to victory in series 6... just with a mite more gratuitous violence.</p>
<p><i>...with the area covering Gunnar's face all caved in.</i></p>	<p>I have it on very good authority (from a winning dungeoneer, no less) that the Helmet of Justice was a cycle helmet covered in papier maché - and it did get damaged occasionally. It didn't have a chance of standing up to the punishment Gunnar just gave it.</p>
<p><u>VICTORY</u></p>	
<p>TEXT REFERENCE</p>	<p>NOTE</p>
<p><i>"Hordriss the Confuser! Queen Greystagg! Sir Hugh de Witless! Count Brinkatore! Julius Scaramonger! Mr and Mrs Grimwold! Barry Thorne! Treguard of Dunshelm! Can you hear me? (...) Treguard of Dunshelm, your dungeon took one hell of a beating! Your dungeon took one hell of a beating!"</i></p>	<p>And there's a suitably Norwegian ending for a Norwegian team. You have, of course, noticed the similarity between this and Bjørge Lillelien's world-famous outburst when Norway beat England at football for the first time ever in 1981. If I'd known his full commentary at the time, I might have included the whole lot. Although Gunnar is unlikely to be a massive football fan...</p>
<p><i>"Call three times," Håkon reminded the one man who should have known better than anyone.</i></p>	<p>As you'll all know, Hordriss's calling name was <i>Malefact</i>, so even after Treguard called three times, he should not have appeared at all...</p>

<i>"Restitue!"</i>	I needed to invent one of Hordriss's cod-Latin phrases to bring Gunnar back from the Dungeon. It seemed the best thing to do was dig into my Latin dictionary, remember what I'd learnt in school all those many years ago, and come up with something along the lines of "return!"
<i>"Cheers for the offer, but I think we'll have the sword instead," Håkon boomed, jumping up and grabbing it from the back of the room. "See ya."</i>	As if they were going to stop breaking the rules even after the quest had finished...
<i>"And one was just about to use Septentrionales eunt domus to send them home with. One was busy watching The Life of Brian when you called. One finds this film very witty."</i>	So <i>that</i> is where the pompous old goat gets his cod-Latin wibblings from! Clearly, he has about as much command of Latin as Brian did before his grammar-corrective meeting with the Roman guard. <i>Septentrionales</i> is the equally badly-declined equivalent of <i>Romanes</i> (they should both end in -i and not -es) referring to the "Northerns" instead of the Romans.
<i>A man in white racing overalls and a crash helmet appeared. (...) "Jeremy Clarkson, from Chipping Norton." (...) "Richard Hammond, from Gloucester." (...) "James May, from under a pile of oily pieces of a 1960s Moto Guzzi in a flat somewhere in London."</i>	Even though the stars of this episode caused havoc to the <i>Nightmare</i> universe, I always wondered if there could be any team who could be even worse. And then I watched <i>Top Gear</i> ...
<u>EPILOGUE</u>	
TEXT REFERENCE	NOTE

<i>Gunnar was woken up by falling out of bed with a loud crash.</i>	OH NO! IT'S ALL A DREAM! THIS IS THE WORST POSSIBLE CLICHÉ IN THE WHOLE HISTORY OF EVERYTHING EVER! Well, how else did you think this would end? It was either that or have this as a completely separate "special episode" not fitting into the existing series at all. It was the right length (just about), it contained the relevant characters (well, four of them) and had them behaving exactly as you'd expect. And the best way to turn it into a dream was...
<i>As Gunnar's vision returned, he could just about make out "Wszladowychsky Polski Wodka" on the bottle.</i>	...have it as a vodka-induced hallucination! And the brand of vodka he'd been drinking appeared in the dream. No surprises there.
<i>"Oooh, nasty!"</i>	ALL EPISODE I've been waiting to put that in! No <i>Nightmare</i> parody could ever be complete without this phrase. But, with the team winning (or, rather, refusing to be killed by the obstacles that should have killed them) there was only one way to do it. And we all know Gunnar can't handle alcohol, least of all Per-Erik's stash, we know what it'd do to him... <i>everything</i> fell into place for the Grand Finale.
AND FINALLY...	
I will certainly not be ruling out the possibility of <i>Scandinavian Nightmares II</i> . Keep on reading <i>The Eye Shield</i> !	

POETRY CORNER

Today we look back to the very end of series 5, where Kelly and her fellow Lancashire lasses are on an eventful but ultimately pointless trip through the Dungeon.

Now Kelly's maids from Lancs will see
If they can Kelly's heroes be,
Although the time is much too short
To win before they must abort.
With silver purse and candle's light,
The team soon showed they weren't too bright
By buying from Sly a goblin horn,
Thus earning them the archer's scorn.
With knowledge shown, Gwen changed her mind,
And gave an arrow - oh, how kind!
Then Hands came looking for a ruck,
Sir Hugh took him away - what luck!
At level's end, past goblin's threat,
The Gatemaster's desire was met
To take the Warden's token green,
Then level two was quickly seen,
Where Hordriss offered up his staff,
And Kelly grabbed it for a laugh.
Before too long, with book and gold,
The team began to feel the cold.
Aesandre's magic froze the realm,
So Kelly went back to Dunshelm.
Lord Fear was frozen and depressed
But vowed to stop another quest
When the next season rolled around,
Then Treguard told us things profound.

PUZZLE ANSWERS

Going For Nightmare II:

- 1) Sidriss.
- 2) Ghost.
- 3) Leo.
- 4) Tackle.
- 5) Gold.
- 6) Fear.
- 7) Mireman.
- 8) Nicky.
- 9) Causeway.
- 10) Bauble.

Going For Nightmare III:

- 1) Mogdred.
- 2) Wight.
- 3) Claire.
- 4) Spikes.
- 5) Spyglass.
- 6) Grimwold.
- 7) Wraith.
- 8) Simon.
- 9) Doom.
- 10) Key.

A Nightmare Holiday:

Morag, Olga, Rachel and Nita had gone on holiday. After considering destinations as diverse as India, Mali, Cephalonia and Anglesey, they had taken a suggestion from Rachel's stepbrother: Macedonia in Greece. It was the morning after, and as Morag walked into the living room of the apartment, the lingering aroma of tequila slammer linked her mind to the night before.

"I need more than a paracetamol after that night," she groaned. Casting a bleary-eyed and ultimately confused gaze across the room, she asked, "Is that Viagra Nita's holding?"

Rachel looked up from her John Wyndham book and sighed. "No. She's been picking out the blue Smarties again." Nita giggled.

Morag dropped onto the sofa, next to Olga, who was ready to quiz her. "So, Morag, do you regret elbowing that bloke?"

"What bloke?"

"Oh, no one important. Only the bouncer, who almost didn't let us in after that!"

"I remember now. Sorry about that, girls." She didn't, and she wasn't. "What about that guy you were talking to, Nita? The one with three mobile phones? Epic kleptomaniac if you ask me."

"I quite liked him!" replied Nita. "He claimed he was some disgraced rich kid who'd had a party and trashed his parents' divine manor, so they sent him to Greece to pick up some culture."

Rachel smirked. "Well, he got you. And that's a start."

*

Later, on the balcony, Rachel was continuing her John Wyndham book.

"How would we feel if we actually saw a Triffid: jittery? Excited? Curious?" she asked no one in particular.

"Bored," replied Morag, turning her attention back to her noodles. Morag ate masterfully with chopsticks, even when slightly drunk. "Even that book cover's boring, Rachel. Boredom, art and me go hand in hand, I admit it."

"I wish I had the stamina to read a novel daily," remarked Nita. She turned another glossy page of her magazine. (She had been reading about Eric Bana's car movie, *Love the Beast*, and the outrageous car among Eric's discoveries when he viewed comedian Jay Leno's car collection: a McLaren F1.) "This counts as reading, doesn't it? A mild read, at least?"

Rachel grimaced. "More like a bog read."

"Olga, why are you doing that?" asked Morag.

"Lest I let tables get dirty. My inner waitress won't accept that I'm on

holiday," Olga replied. She put down the cloth. "Anyway, the fridge is a bit empty. Shall I make a pilgrimage to the supermarket?"

Rachel thought aloud again. "What would you say is the supermarket of choice for the discerning pilgrim? Aldi? Never Asda."

"Can you get ASBOs in Asda?" quipped Nita.

"I expect there's a way," replied Morag. "I'll ask my stepbrother. He got his ASBO at Manchester Crown Court. But I'm sure it's much the same."